



## Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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### Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

Laura Cordes, Executive Director

#### **H.B. No. 5014 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2013**

February 22, 2012

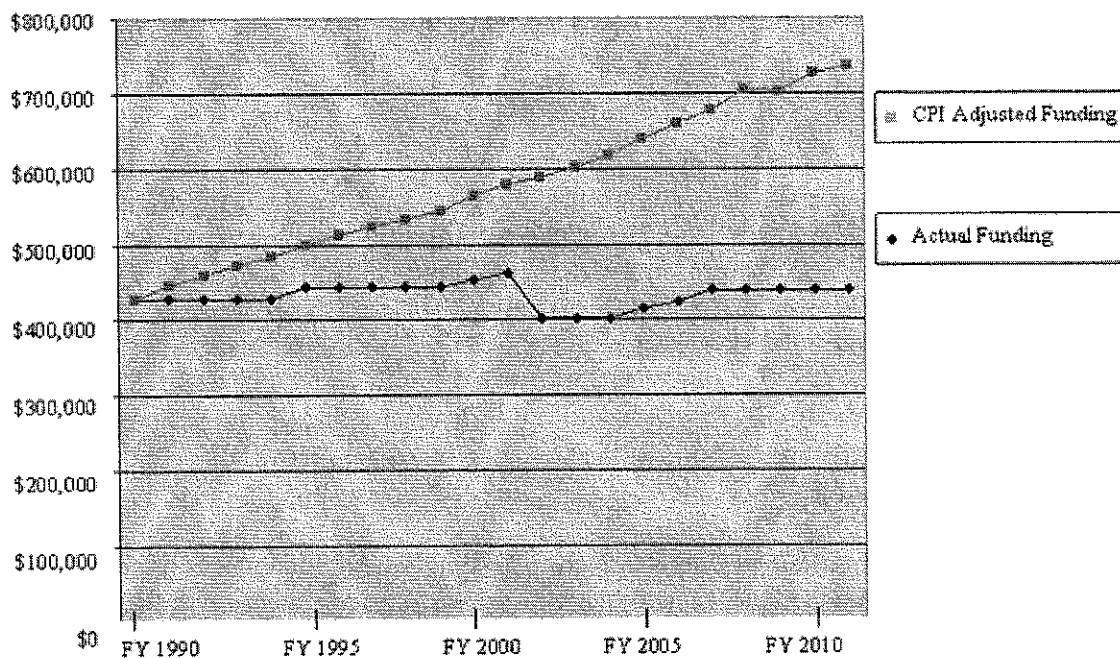
Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Laura Cordes, and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the association of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally-competent sexual assault victim services. We would like to offer comments about how the budgets of both the Department of Public Health and the Judicial Branch will impact sexual assault victims in Connecticut. Specifically, we are in support of the Governor's proposed funding for Rape Crisis programs and a 1% COLA for non-profit providers. We are also in support of the Judicial Branch's request for pick up funding for the State of Connecticut's new Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Program.

#### **Department of Public Health**

During our last fiscal year (FY 10-11), certified sexual assault victim advocates at rape crisis programs provided 24/7 crisis counseling, information, and support to nearly 4,000 victims of sexual assault and their loved ones. Advocates at these programs provide services at all hours of the day and night. When a rape victim goes to the hospital at 2am to be treated for injuries and have forensic evidence collected, our advocates are there. When a sexual assault survivor needs someone to talk to on a Sunday afternoon, victim advocates are available to take their call. Our advocates staff the nation's first statewide Spanish-language rape crisis hotline, run support groups, provide individual counseling, participate in the Multi-Disciplinary Teams that review child abuse cases, undertake community awareness campaigns, and provide education and training to over 35,000 people each year. Further, they provide all of these services free of charge and with no waiting list.

Funding sexual assault crisis services is an important investment in our communities. Unfortunately, funding for rape crisis services through the Department of Public Health line item has remained virtually flat-funded for over 20 years. In 1990, rape crisis services received \$427,861. For the current fiscal year, the appropriated amount is \$439,484 – only \$11,823 more than the 1990. With a 5% rescission, the rape crisis line item will fall to \$417,877, which is \$11,823 *less* than the nominal amount received in 1990. When adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI), **2012 post-rescission funding for rape crisis programs in terms of real dollars is 43% less than the funding received in 1990.**

### CT State Funding for Rape Crisis Services, FY 1990 - 2011



- After Governor Malloy's 5% rescission and adjustments for inflation (using the consumer price index), **the real dollar amount of state funding for rape crisis services declined 43% between 1990 and 2012.**
- In 1990, rape crisis services received \$427,861. In 2012, after the Governor's rescission, rape crisis services will receive \$417,877.
- Rape crisis services would need to receive \$742,013 this year to match the real dollar amount (adjusted for inflation) of funding received in 1990.

### Judicial Branch

CONNSACS supports the Judicial Branch's request for a pickup of \$120,000 to fund the State's new Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program (SAFE Program) through June of 2013.

Since December of 2010, the State of Connecticut, Office of Victim Services, Gail Burns-Smith Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program (SAFE Program) has been providing forensic medical services to victims of sexual violence in Central and Eastern Connecticut. The program, which was created in 2009 through Public Act 09-3, is the result of several years of advocacy and active legislative support. In its first year, the SAFE Program ensured that 163 victims of sexual violence received prompt, knowledgeable, and compassionate care at six participating hospitals:

We believe that the SAFE Program produces benefits at all stages of the response to sexual violence, and we support the Judicial Branch's request for continued funding through June of 2013.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide you with any additional information about the importance of full funding for the rape crisis line item or the continued funding of the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program.

Thank you.

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State of Connecticut, Judicial Branch  
Office of Victim Services

**GAIL BURNS-SMITH SEXUAL ASSAULT FORENSIC EXAMINERS PROGRAM**

**FACT SHEET**

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**Background**

- Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc., (CONNSACS) established the Connecticut SANE/SAFE Coalition, comprised of key stakeholders, who were instrumental in advocating for the establishment of a sexual assault forensic examiners (SAFE) program.
- In September 2009, Public Act 09-3 authorized the Office of Victim Services (OVS) to establish a program to train and make available sexual assault forensic examiners to adult and adolescent victims of sexual assault at participating hospitals.
- This Public Act also created a 12-member Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Advisory Committee to advise OVS on establishing and implementing the program.
- The Advisory Committee voted unanimously to name the program after the late Gail Burns-Smith, a dedicated community and national advocate for victims of sexual assault.
- On December 2, 2010, the SAFE Program launched on a part-time basis with three participating hospitals in Central and Eastern Connecticut.
- Since April 2011, the SAFE Program has been operating 24 hours, 7 days a week and available through an on-call system at the following six acute care hospitals: Hartford Hospital; Hospital of Central Connecticut, New Britain; Manchester Memorial Hospital, Middlesex Hospital; Saint Francis Hospital; and Windham Hospital.

**Purpose**

- To provide timely, compassionate, patient-centered sexual assault forensic examination services to sexual assault victims, 13 years or older, who present within 72 hours of the assault at a participating hospital.
- To utilize an integrated response to sexual assault by working with sexual assault victim advocates, law enforcement, emergency department staff, and criminal justice personnel.
- To provide specialized training and education to qualified nurses and physicians enabling them to perform knowledgeable and skilled forensic examinations.
- To ensure the integrity, preservation, and documentation of forensic evidence.
- To ensure the chain of custody to maintain the integrity of the evidence and establish the validity and admissibility of the evidence in court.
- To provide expert testimony during criminal proceedings, when needed.
- To provide oversight and quality assurance monitoring within the SAFE Program.